

REPORT OF THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH, RELATIVE TO A COMMUNICATION FROM THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION.

To the Honorable the General Assembly:

The undersigned, the Joint Standing Committee "On Public Health," to whom was referred the communication of the Secretary of the American Public Health Association to His Excellency, the Governor, accompanied with the address of Hon. Erastus Brooks, of New York City, respectfully present the following report:

The communication referred to this committee was as follows:

OFFICE OF AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION,

WAKEFIELD, Dec. 29, 1880.

To His Excellency, the Governor of Rhode Island:

GOVERNOR: In compliance with the resolution of the American Public Health Association, passed at its Eight Annual Session, at New Orleans, La., Dec. 7th and 10th, 1880, I have the honor to transmit herewith a copy of the address of the Hon. Erastus Brooks, of New York, respectfully asking that you will consider the propriety of calling the attention of the Legislature of your State to the importance of action in the directions indicated in the address.

I have the honor to be faithfully yours,

AZEL AMES, JR., *Secretary.*

The resolution of the American Public Health Association alluded to, was as follows:

Resolved, "That 500 copies of the address before this Association, by Hon. Erastus Brooks, of New York, on 'What the States owe the People,' be printed in pamphlet form, and copies be sent to the Governors of the States, together

with a communication, respectfully asking them to consider the propriety of calling the attention of the legislative bodies in their states to the importance of action in the direction indicated in the paper."

A perusal of the address shows the following propositions and points, having special reference to legislative action, and to which the Governors of the several States were desired to call the attention of their several legislative bodies.

That the great object of government should be the enactment and enforcement of laws to regulate communities and persons; and the first provisions of law should be to secure protection to person and property; and in protection of the person, secure to them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and in the direction of security to life, and pursuit of happiness, it is the duty of the State to provide for the best maintenance of the public health. The consideration of the subject of health is among the first, if not the very first, in the science of political economy.

Disease, among a large class, is often but another name for poverty, pauperism, orphanage and bankruptcy. The State and the people, personally, have the deepest interest (not always realized) in measures that may be taken to prevent and restrict diseases.

It is one of the first duties of the State to remove or abate, as far as possible, the causes of all pestilences, epidemics and endemics.

If Massachusetts, and other States have accomplished a great work in preventing the lung plague in cattle, what ought not all the States to do in preventing even worse diseases in men, women and children. The results will enure to the States in the three-fold form of economy, thrift and morals.

It is demonstrated in the City of New York, by the President of the city Board of Health, that thousands of young lives have been saved yearly, for ten years and more, by the enforcement of health laws passed by the State.

It has been alleged, by way of criticism, that the health service is costly, but it can be proved to be the best possible investment.

It was shown by the British Scientific Association, three years ago,

that both the sick and the death rate had been reduced one-third by the enforcement of sanitary laws in the United Kingdom, and that they might be reduced more than one-half, with less crowding in tenements, and proper supply of pure water, surface cleansing and drainage.

The Ship-Fever, so called, has, by the enforcement of proper sanitary law, according to the Health Physician of New York, become almost totally extinct.

“Asiatic Cholera, always an imported disease, can be confined to narrow limits, and so also Yellow Fever, as has been demonstrated during the year, by judicious Federal and State laws.”

In closing the address, of which the extracts above are but a meagre part of the points presented and maintained, the speaker presents the following conclusions as to the duties of the Federal government and the States:

I. “Supervision over the health of the entire people; peaceably if it can be done, forcibly if necessary.

“Where the Federal government has authority as upon the seas, lakes and large rivers, over forts and arsenals, the army and navy, in legislation for commerce, especially in relation to infected vessels, and over animals exported and imported, this authority belongs to Congress.

II. “State governments are clothed with power over the health of the people within their respective commonwealths, where the Federal government relinquishes jurisdiction.

“The colleges and schools, institutions of charity, prisons and reformatories, thoroughfares of all kinds, public and even private dwellings, if obviously dangerous to health, belong to the parental care and should have the sanitary supervision of the State.

“Epidemics are to be treated as public enemies. They come or are fostered by foul sewerage, polluted streams and corrupted wells of water. To abate these nuisances; to prevent adulterations in food; to clothe boards of health, trustees or supervisors in towns and villages; mayors, common councils or health boards in cities, not only with

ample power in regard to health, but to require them to pass and enforce ordinances, is a positive duty of the State."

In regard to measures by legislative enactment in the direction indicated in the address, already in force in this State, we present the following statement from the Secretary of the State Board of Health:

"Provision has already been made in Rhode Island by General Statutes, which cover a large part of the field of legislative work suggested by the Hon. Erastus Brooks. These statutes relate to

"The suppression of nuisances.

"The prevention of contagious and infectious diseases. (*a*) By quarantine and (*b*) by specified local action throughout the towns.

"The prevention of contagious diseases among domestic animals.

"The inspection and sale of articles of food; of illuminating and explosive fluids; and regulations concerning the sale of medicines.

"The authority for the abatement of nuisances is vested in the Board of Aldermen of the cities, and the Town Councils of the several towns. They are by statute constituted local boards of health.

"It is one of the duties of the State Board of Health to make investigations into the effects of localities upon the public health, but no authority has been allowed the Board to suppress any nuisance, or ascertained source of sickness.

"A considerable number of nuisances that have come to the knowledge of the Board, have, however, been abated by notice given the town council, and a much larger number have been wholly removed, or the objectionable features greatly lessened, by courteous private remonstrance, by letter or personal interview, with parties having property value invested in the suspected premises.

"It has seemed better to the Secretary of the Board to secure suppression of private nuisances, suspected of endangering the public health, by personal suggestion and appeal when possible, rather than by notice given the authorities, and resort to arbitrary legal measures. These persons do not wish to have their names, in connection with the circumstances, brought before the public. In many cases their continuance was the result of thoughtlessness and incredulity in regard

to danger therefrom, and were promptly removed upon information given.

“Investigations to some extent have been made, and are now being made as time and circumstances will permit, in regard to the pollution of the waters of some of the larger rivers of the State.

“In Massachusetts, several thousands of dollars have been expended under the direction of the State Board of Health and by experts appointed for that purpose, in the investigation of pollution of rivers; and it may be added, also, that investigations into other presumed sources, or known causes of sickness, have been annually made by persons having special qualifications for each particular kind of work, under direction of the Board, and at an expense for these investigations, several times larger than the whole appropriation for the whole amount of work of the State Board of this State, in all of its departments. These investigations have made the reports of the Massachusetts Board very valuable, and cannot be equalled by the Boards of any State except by the expenditure of large sums of money.

“The Secretary finds the clerical work of the office consumes a great deal of time, and the duties of the Board run in so many directions that the hours of each day are broken up by different pursuits, and continuous application to any investigation rendered impossible.

“Investigations will however be continued as time will allow, and reported when completed.

“In regard to specific investigations by experts, there has been, and is, a feeling among the members of the General Assembly, that in the present financial condition of the State, it would be an inopportune time to make appropriations for such purposes.”

It will be seen that the State has provided ways and means for considerable sanitary work, so far as the official or ministerial agencies are needed, but instruments and machinery will not work without some force applied. The town councils in some towns are indisposed to act in the way of abatement of nuisances having evident unsanitary conditions, for fear of incurring individual enmity, or expense that

may be considered needless by some tax-payers. It must be admitted also, that there are nuisances which would require very large expense in removal, of which it is very difficult to determine what would be the best mode of removal, and which should not be attempted without mature deliberation.

It will perhaps be extending the report too much, to give in detail how the existing laws of Rhode Island cover nearly all the points raised in the address, and how, if thoroughly enforced in spirit and letter, would leave no large number of requisites unattended to.

STAFFORD W. RAZEE,
ANDREW H. MANCHESTER,
ABIJAH B. SWEET,

Of the Senate.

OBADIAH CHACE,
I. B. MASON,
CHAS. E. CHICKERING,
ALBERT BUFFUM,
DANIEL WILKINSON,

Of the House of Representatives.

